When George Murphy signed on as Chief Marketing Officer at Chautauqua Institution last fall, he knew he had only a few months to take full advantage of an extraordinary opportunity. The PBS documentary “Chautauqua: An American Narrative” was scheduled to premiere to a national audience at the end of January 2011.

Based on his years of experience in global marketing for products ranging from Coca-Cola to GE Lighting to Ford and Chrysler automobiles, Murphy characterized the PBS broadcast as something roughly equivalent to $10 million worth of national advertising for the Institution. “The PBS Special was excellent and gave a nice snapshot of what Chautauqua does and why we are relevant,” Murphy explains.

“The PBS audience lies right across our target market—people who love the arts and lifelong learning, people 45 to 65 years of age.” Recognizing that the documentary would likely drive thousands of newcomers to the Chautauqua website, Murphy worked with his team in the Marketing and Communications Department to redesign the site to be more welcoming and dramatically appealing to first-time visitors. He also led efforts to bring as many available guest accommodations under one, user-friendly search engine, accessible from the home page.

“Our objective was to make sure that people coming to the site for the first time would immediately get a good feeling for this place, what it’s about, and all that we have to offer,” explains Murphy, who has been coming to Chautauqua with his wife and daughters for 22 years. The new website, launched in early January, features short, dramatic videos and slide shows that capture a day in the life during the summer season. Special pages for each of the pillars—arts, recreation, religion, education, and youth—are accompanied by gorgeous photos and inviting copy, written especially for prospective visitors.

Knowing the challenge of identifying where to stay as a first-time guest, Murphy also insisted that the accommodations portion of the website be fundamentally revamped. Eighty percent of rentable properties in the area are now online with features that allow visitors to search for type of lodging (condo, cottage, boarding house, hotel room), number of bedrooms, location on the grounds, and other amenities such as pet-friendly properties.

More than 100 calls and e-mails are being fielded per day; sixty percent are requests for a Chautauqua information packet. Website visits have gone up from an average of 1,200 per day to 3,200.

see COVER STORY Page 2
“Purchasing any combination of gate and event tickets is also now possible online,” Murphy reports, “and we have put in place a 24-hour call center to answer questions about any aspect of the Chautauqua experience.” The service will continue for the next two to three months as the PBS show continues airing around the country in different markets.

The response has been lively as Murphy anticipated. More than 100 calls and e-mails are being fielded per day; sixty percent are requests for a Chautauqua information packet. Website visits have gone from an average of 1,200 per day to 3,200 each day in the month of February, and some 70 to 75 percent of these visitors are new to the site. Before the documentary aired, newcomers represented approximately 30 percent of Chautauqua website visitors.

Tracking software also shows that people are staying online and going deeper into the site to investigate the particulars of various programs, and, says Murphy, “the third most visited site is accommodations, which would indicate that people are moving along in their decision process about a summer vacation.”

Interest in Chautauqua from new sources is particularly good news just now for the Institution, given the economic downturn and the overall trend of families coming for shorter and shorter stays.

“Despite some growth in the middle of the decade, Chautauqua’s overall summer population has declined since 2000,” says Murphy, “so we set a three percent volume growth target each year for a number of years. This type of growth translates to roughly 100 more people per week over the whole season, and capacity shouldn’t be an issue over the next few years.”

Such modest growth will help offset operating expenses and allow Chautauqua to achieve greater sustainability, while still using philanthropic dollars to enhance programmatic quality and thematic innovations as outlined in the Institution’s most recent strategic plan.

But George Murphy’s goals are about more than the bottom line. A commitment to improving customer service has informed every initiative the Institution has launched this off-season. Food service is one focus as the Institution begins to consider possible renovations to the Refectory and how to serve the needs of its clientele. The Athenaeum Hotel—where most first-time visitors check in when they do not plan to stay a full week—is continuing to enhance both accommodations and service standards, while also offering for the first time the convenience of allowing guests to come straight through the gate with nothing more than a confirmation number. They can now pick up their tickets at the hotel, rather than waiting in line at the gate. Further refinements to main gate services will also be added this season to make the experience more efficient and friendly, including tables set inside the main gate where guests can learn more and immediately book activities—golf, sailing, Children’s School, Boys’ and Girls’ Club, and other opportunities—as they first come on the grounds.

Murphy intends to follow up with new guests to find out what attracted them to Chautauqua in the first place and whether the Institution met their expectations. This evaluation process is especially significant because in recent years Chautauqua has experienced what Murphy calls “churn”—that is, about 3,000 weekly visitors each year do not come back the next year.

“The good news,” says Murphy, “is that we have been able to draw about 3,000 new guests each year to offset the folks who don’t return, but we need to figure out what’s going on with those who don’t come back. How do we make sure they want to come back?”

Chautauqua’s new investment in marketing and branding is off to a fast start. For his part, George Murphy says he’s pleased with how flexible staff members have been in modifying aspects of the customer experience. “Once they see why we need to do it differently, they embrace it 100 percent,” he says.

Murphy is also mindful of the need to focus on what’s most critical for the highest impact. “In the nonprofit world you simply don’t have the human and capital resources we had in the business sector. We have to figure the most creative ways to do more with less.” The Athenaeum Hotel—where most first-time visitors check in when they do not plan to stay a full week—is continuing to enhance both accommodations and service standards, while also offering for the first time the convenience of allowing guests to come straight through the gate with nothing more than a confirmation number. They can now pick up their tickets at the hotel, rather than waiting in line at the gate. Further refinements to main gate services will also be added this season to make the experience more efficient and friendly, including tables set inside the main gate where guests can learn more and immediately book activities—golf, sailing, Children’s School, Boys’ and Girls’ Club, and other opportunities—as they first come on the grounds.

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Raising the bar,

MEETING THE PROMISE

A popular internet encyclopedia defines sustainability as “the capacity to endure.” In the natural world, the key ingredient for sustainability is biological diversity. In human terms, sustainability is the product of proper balance across the environment, the economy, and our social fabric. At Chautauqua, all of these dimensions obtain, and sustainability is our watchword.

The Institution’s trustees have given particular attention to the issue of sustainability in their strategic planning. Heading into our 15th decade, Chautauqua’s operational objectives continue to emphasize efficiency and fiscal restraint along with a rational acceptance of the ongoing need for philanthropy to fill the annual gap between gate revenues and the resources needed to fulfill our mission.

We are thrilled to report that despite a continuing national climate of economic uncertainty, a diverse group of Chautauquans has once again come forward to help us fill this gap through the Chautauqua Fund. For 2010, we exceeded our total goal of $3.3 million by $16,000, which represents more than a five percent gain and an increase of $168,000 over the Chautauqua Fund’s 2009 total.

For the coming year, our Chautauqua Fund goal is once again higher, and we are firmly committed to increasing the number of Chautauquans who participate in the annual fund. We continue to keep our fundraising costs at only nine percent, a very low overhead, thanks to the generosity and number of volunteers who work tirelessly for the Fund. All Chautauquans owe these folks our gratitude.

In the coming year we will also raise the bar for The Bestor Society, asking donors to make a minimum gift of $3,500 to join this distinguished circle of support. The new entry level has been established not only due to the impact of inflation but because of the increased importance of annual fund dollars in the overall budget, as our returns on endowment have declined in the past decade.

As part of our emphasis on the Chautauqua Fund, a new donor group—The 1874 Society—has been established this year for annual fund gifts ranging from a minimum of $1,874 up to the Bestor level. These donors will receive invitations to special tours, a luncheon with a platform speaker, and a special cabaret performance during the season. They will also receive the Pillars newsletter. In doing so we seek to provide appropriate recognition and express more publicly our gratitude to those who make such consequential gifts.

Of course, the strategic vision for Chautauqua going forward is about much more than sustainability. It is about deepening the connections across our traditional pillars of arts, education, religion, and recreation so that each week’s theme finds expression in the variety of vehicles by which we deliver the Chautauqua experience for all ages. It is about meeting the promise of Chautauqua to affirm that reasoned debate and dialogue across our political and philosophical differences is still possible and mightily preferable to the rancor and paralysis at work in the nation today. It is about meeting the promise of greater innovation and quality in our programming across all departments while disseminating the best of Chautauqua nationwide through a variety of means year round.

Unrestricted endowment gifts profoundly strengthen the platform on which we stand as an institution aspiring to become an increasingly influential model in matters of civility and adult education nationwide.

Enduring Gifts:

MARTHINSEN’S ENDOW CHAPLAINCY

Alison and Craig Marthinsen are fourth generation Chautauquans who are dedicated participants in Sunday morning worship services and the 9:15 devotions held weekdays in the Amp. Alison sings in the Sunday morning choir, a practice she began in 1974 and only relinquished for a time when her boys, now 26, 24 and 21, were young. One of the Marthinsens’ sons is currently studying at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena.

Back home in Toronto, the couple attends a non-denominational church, so they feel right at home in the ecumenical worship experience at Chautauqua. Long, sustained friendships have been made for the couple over the years through the Sunday choir, and they are always eager to hear the chaplains who come to preach for a week at a time.

The Marthinsens approached the Institution to create an endowment fund to support such week-long chaplaincies to ensure that future generations will continue to hear the same quality of teaching and preaching they have so enjoyed at Chautauqua.

“I look at it this way,” says Craig. “People can spend fifty or a hundred thousand dollars on a car that will last five to ten years. Giving to an endowment is so enduring. The money keeps on giving. Invested wisely, our gift can generate just as much money for future years. I can’t think of a better investment.”

“We like how Chautauqua started as a Sunday school teachers retreat, says Alison. “I want to ensure it has a way to continue.”

To achieve these aspirational goals we must continue to seek gifts to our endowment, which are essential in closing the gap on capital investment. Last year the Foundation received in excess of $3 million in gifts dedicated to endowment. These gifts profoundly strengthen the platform on which we stand as an institution aspiring to become an increasingly influential model in matters of civility and adult education nationwide.

Thanks to all of you who contributed in 2010 and to those of you who will continue to sustain and enliven the Institution in 2011.
On Miller Park, in sight of the Edison house, there’s a cottage notable for a sailboat mast that’s suspended horizontally just below the porch ceiling but high above the wicker furniture.

The Thistle Sailboat from which it came belonged to Harold McBride (“Mac”) Thurston, a Harvard graduate who greatly enjoyed his boat was struck by lightning when it was moored out there, so my grandfather hauled it up near the porch ceiling, and it’s been there ever since.”

“Then one winter all the pipes froze and the toilets and sinks exploded.”

It took ten years, but the Brueschkes eventually bought back the Thurston house, and remarkably, an old Morton Salt box Chris remembered from her childhood summers at Chautauqua was still in the back of the pantry. Now the Brueschkes have modernized and built out the basement for their summer guests who visit from as far away as Asia, Europe, and San Francisco. However, the living spaces on the first and second floors—which the Brueschkes occupy along with their two sons, nine-year-old Thane and six-year old Leiden—are much like they were when Chris was a girl. “Eighty percent of the furniture is what’s different is the role that Chautauqua plays in their family and the home on Miller Park with their faces. Birds call. It’s a bright August morning, and the trees in Miller Park are glittering from a pre-dawn rain.

She was skeptical, but now looks back at Jason’s words as both prophetic and evidence of his optimistic worldview. To assuage their sense of loss and keep a toehold in Chautauqua, the Brueschkes asked for a first option to buy if they ever decided to sell the place. Though the new owners wrote back and sent along a letter to the new owners of the Thurston house. The couple lived in Switzerland and weren’t able to use the cottage for long periods of time. The Brueschkes asked for a first option to buy if they ever decided to sell the place. Though the new owners wrote back and sent along a letter to the new owners of the Thurston house. The couple lived in Switzerland and weren’t able to use the cottage for long periods of time. The Brueschkes asked for a first option to buy if they ever decided to sell the place.

Chris was distraught. She had spent summers at Chautauqua all her life. After college at Yale, she had met Jason at Stanford Business School. It was during business school that her grandfather decided to sell the house. As unemployed graduate students with only debts and no income, they couldn’t possibly afford to buy the house themselves—especially at that time, when Chautauqua property prices were shooting ever skyward. “Don’t worry,” Jason told Chris, “we’ll get it back.” She was skeptical, but now looks back at Jason’s words as both prophetic and evidence of his optimistic worldview.

Today, Thurston’s granddaughter, Christine Brueschke, sits on the porch beside her husband, Jason, originally from Oklahoma. Both look up at the mast with a smile on their faces. Birds call. It’s a bright August morning, and the trees in Miller Park are glittering from a pre-dawn rain.

“My grandfather was not the best sailor,” Chris, who was raised in Atlanta, explains, “but he loved to get out on the lake. One day the boat was struck by lightning when it was moored out there, so my grandfather hauled it up near the road to inspect the damage. We’re not exactly sure what happened, but my grandfather was pretty sure that an elderly neighbor backed her car right into the boat and totaled it—she drove on without ever realizing what had happened. My grandfather hung the mast from the porch ceiling, and it’s been there ever since.”

After Chris’s grandmother passed away in 1982, Thurston remarried and his second wife, Jean Lankford Thurston, embraced Chautauqua and the home on Miller Park with delight. However, the burdens of keeping up an old house eventually caused the Thurstons to put the cottage on the market in 1996 and move to a condo at the Overlook. After Chris’s grandmother passed away in 1982, Thurston remarried and his second wife, Jean Lankford Thurston, embraced Chautauqua and the home on Miller Park with delight. However, the burdens of keeping up an old house eventually caused the Thurstons to put the cottage on the market in 1996 and move to a condo at the Overlook.
So are the Brueschke children. “We live in an urban jungle where our kids go from planned activity to planned activity,” Chris adds. “It’s simply the culture,” Jason explains. “Kids in Asia lead very regimented lives. There is tremendous academic competition. Most kids go to math tutors, academic tutors—every minute is scheduled. With 1.4 billion Chinese and 1.1 billion people in India, the focus on education there is very left brain, very much about the rote memorization of facts, of getting to the top solely with grades.”

Though Thane and Leiden attend the Hong Kong International School, which offers an American curriculum and opportunities for sports and arts activities, the emphasis on regimen is nevertheless dominant. The boys don’t even have bicycles there—there is nowhere safe to ride—due to the narrow roads and the busy city streets. Children rarely have the time or space to play freely. “In Hong Kong,” Chris explains, “someone has a pair of eyes on these kids at all times.”

When the Brueschkes come to Chautauqua, however, their Hong Kong life is upended. Here, the boys are very rarely allowed on the computers and they have no television in the cottage. Instead, they spend much of their waking hours playing in Miller Park, riding their bikes or swimming and boating on the lake. “In Hong Kong they get up by eight and are off to Club, home for lunch, and back to Club until four o’clock. They spend a lot of time in the fields and with their friends and running around our neighborhood. There is so much play, so much more free time.”

“Chautauqua is the right brain side of their lives,” says Jason. “My personal view is that our kids will have an advantage from being exposed to both worlds. They have Korean, Indian, European and Chinese friends. They have already travelled and seen so much. Our son knew at age five that Gandhi was Hindu and from India. Our children have such a breadth of global exposure—and then, they also have Chautauqua.”

GIVING BACK

The Brueschkes are grateful for the balance of experiences that Chautauqua brings to their lives and to their children. Off and on Chris has worked in development with various nonprofits and is quick to suggest that every gift, regardless of size, to an organization like Chautauqua is important. “A lot of Americans give to their universities, but college was only four years. Sure, there were a lot of years when the only birthday cards I got were from my Mom and Princeton.” He laughs. “Universities know how to fundraise, but what Chautauqua offers us throughout our entire lives is much more significant than my four years of college were.”

“We give to a number of organizations,” he continues, “but this place gets a big share of our support because we know the cost of the gate pass doesn’t come close to covering what people get emotionally, spiritually, and socially here. Your money makes a difference at Chautauqua in a way it doesn’t in some other places. The time we spend and the importance of Chautauqua to us and to so many people is easy to take for granted. The intergenerational aspect alone—it is so nice for our kids to be with people in their eighties here—is something worth supporting!”

Just for themselves, the Brueschkes especially treasure the porch culture. “We spend a lot of time out here just sitting and talking,” says Chris. “It’s a Norman Rockwell painting come to life,” Jason adds.

Last season the family added a motorboat and a sunfish sailboat to their summer accouterments, and now they are keeping up “Bapa” Thurston’s tradition out on the lake. Meanwhile the mast still hangs over them like a prayer.

“A lot of Americans give to their universities, but college was only four years. Sure, there were a lot of years when the only birthday cards I got were from my Mom and Princeton.” Jason Brueschke laughs. “Universities know how to fundraise, but what Chautauqua offers us throughout our entire lives is much more significant than my four years of college were.”
It will be a long-time vision realized this summer when Chautauqua hosts an extraordinary exhibition of some eighteen works on paper loaned by Buffalo’s Albright-Knox Art Gallery. The show will hang in the Gallo Family Gallery upstairs in Chautauqua’s Strohl Art Center.

Titled Abstraction in America: Forties to Sixties, the show will feature works by a number of iconic artists from the era, including Hans Hofmann, Jasper Johns, Cy Twombly, Louise Bourgeois, Adolph Gottlieb, Franz Kline, and Lee Krasner. The exhibit, curated by Don Kimes, Artistic Director of the Visual Arts at Chautauqua (VACI), and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery’s Curatorial Assistant, Ilana Chlebowski, will also include a catalog with critical essays and posters available for purchase.

During one week this season, Lois Jubeck, VACI’s Managing Director, has also scheduled an excursion to Buffalo. Art students and other Chautauquans will travel to Albright-Knox, the Burchfield-Penney Art Center and the Darwin Martin House as part of the Buffalo collaboration.

The John R. Oishei Foundation is supporting this exhibit and two more, one each year for three seasons at Chautauqua. All will feature works from the permanent collection at Albright-Knox.

“Chautauqua is a jewel that we’d love for more Buffalonians to experience just as we’d love for more Chautauquans to visit Buffalo during their stays in the region,” says Oishei President Robert Gioia. “Our mission at the foundation is simple. We want to be a catalyst to enhance economic vitality and the quality of life for the Buffalo Niagara region. Our partnerships with Chautauqua help expand the impact of the Institution as a regional asset.”

Don Kimes celebrated his 25th year as Director of the Visual Arts at Chautauqua Institution last year.
“The Abstraction in America: Forties to Sixties exhibition is the only show we’ve ever done that will stay up all nine weeks,” says Judy Barie, a full time studio artist from Pittsburgh who serves as Gallery Director for VACI. “Because so many Chautauquans these days are coming for only a week or two at a time, it seems appropriate that an exhibit of this importance be available the whole season.”

The show is but one indicator of the dramatically increased scope of the visual arts at Chautauqua. Kimes, Jubeck and Barie are now programming two gallery buildings, the Melvin Johnson Sculpture Garden, the visual arts lecture series and the Chautauqua School of Art. Together, these facilities will feature 11 shows over nine weeks, an ambitious agenda.

“Our resources now allow us to bring smaller collections to Chautauqua that people won’t see elsewhere,” says Kimes. “And we are continuing to attract major figures in the arts world as faculty in the Art School. We are the only summer program that has a school and galleries of this stature. Thanks to philanthropy, we have arrived at a whole new level.”

The opening reception for the collaborative exhibit with Albright-Knox will be held Sunday, June 26, from 3 to 5 p.m. at the Gallo Family Gallery in the Strohl Art Center. For more information, see http://www.ciweb.org/VACI/.

Abstraction in America: Forties to Sixties • June 26 – August 22
Opening Reception Sunday June 26 / 3 – 5 p.m. • Strohl Art Center, Gallo Family Gallery

This exhibition initiates an exciting three year series titled, “Albright-Knox at Chautauqua,” organized by VACI Artistic Director Don Kimes in conjunction with Albright-Knox Art Gallery’s Curatorial Assistant, Ilana Chlebowski, and made possible by a generous grant from the Oishei Foundation. This series of exhibitions will center on the evolution of abstraction from the 1940s to the present. Albright-Knox Art Gallery, founded in 1862 in Buffalo, New York, has a distinctive and impressive collection of abstract art which grew to its height during the middle of the 20th century. The 2011 summer show focuses on working drawings, prints and paintings by several seminal artists, including Milton Avery, Louise Bourgeois, Dorothy Dehner, Sam Francis, Adolph Gottlieb, Hans Hofmann, Paul Jenkins, Alfred Jensen, Jasper Johns, Franz Kline, Beatrice Mandelman, Mark Tobey, Cy Twombly, and others. All works will be on view courtesy of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery.
Essential Care For Historic Properties: 
THE ROLE OF ENDOWMENT IN MAINTENANCE

In a couple of months, Chautauqua will be in full bloom, lawns green, winter awnings rolled up, and the cottages and public buildings wide open. But as of this writing, there is still a foot of snow on the ground, and the cumulative winter totals for the region have been well over 200 inches. Caring for Chautauqua’s historic properties in such a climate falls largely to Doug Conroe, director of operations for the Institution.

This year, among his variety of duties, Conroe had to reckon with a snow load that dealt a heavy blow to Logan Dormitory on Bestor Plaza, separating the front porch from the main building.

“Logan is a wood frame structure and among our oldest,” Conroe explains. “Each year we drain the pipes and turn off the heat, but sometimes the weather gets the better of us anyway.”

Originally a private cottage, Logan was built around 1890, making it the same vintage as the Amphitheater and Alumni Hall. Logan was donated to the ChautauquaYWCA in 1918. In 1965 it became a dormitory for summer school students. Over the years it has also been used by Special Studies and more recently as an art gallery. Today Logan serves as summer headquarters for The Chautauquan Daily, in addition to providing faculty housing for the School of Music’s voice program.

Logan is one of an identified set of historic buildings on the grounds for which the Institution seeks to raise a permanent endowment for deferred maintenance. Endowment funds for newer buildings are also among the goals in the Institution’s strategic plan to help reduce Chautauqua’s annual capital expenditures.

Several families have already set a precedent for maintenance endowments. Tom and Susie Hagen, who made possible the restoration of the Hagen-Wesley House, Chuck and Char Fowler, who funded the renovation of Fowler-Kellogg Art Center, and the Strohl family for the Strohl Art Center all were generous enough to provide, in addition to their major gifts for renovation, endowment funds designated for future upkeep of these historic facilities. Gloria Plevin joined the Fowlers in funding the endowment to care for Fowler-Kellogg.

“Though major renovations are not anticipated for Logan in the near term, endowment for upkeep is a priority goal,” says Foundation CEO Geof Follansbee. “We have run the numbers for every major facility on the grounds, and we need to set aside approximately $3 million each year to manage the maintenance of our properties. Our models show that Logan’s share on an annual basis is just under $15,000. And while that sum would not be expended each year, it needs to be built up so that it is available when it is time for a new roof.”

Doug Conroe elaborates: “People tend to forget that in this climate, the schedule for repainting and reroofing a building like Logan is shorter than in other regions. If you can keep a roof for ten years, you’re doing well here.”

At best, Logan Dorm provides modest accommodations for performing arts faculty. A shared kitchen on the first floor serves the seven voice faculty members and one theater staff member who occupy the eight rooms and shared, dorm-style baths on the second floor. Two music school festival accompanists generally occupy Logan’s third floor apartment.

“Though other arrangements off the grounds for these same music school faculty have been made in the past,” says housing coordinator Jamie Kranak, “the group told us they missed the social aspect and sense of community that Logan creates. They like being in the center of things.”

Doug Conroe notes that while the first and third floors of Logan do have air conditioning, a pool of money to care for a facility such as Logan annually would allow for the installation of air conditioning on the second floor and similar small but critical upgrades. “These would make a major difference in the residential experience of our faculty and help us retain their services in the years to come,” Conroe says.

Logan is, of course, just one of the 100 buildings that Conroe and his staff must maintain each year and which are integral to the operation of the Institution each summer. Some are much more costly to maintain. For example, the annual investment in the Athenaeum Hotel measured over a 10 to 15 year timeline is just shy of a half million dollars per year. The Institution spends a similar amount in road maintenance each year. More than $100,000 is spent each year on information technology. Even the Bell Tower and the Health Clinic require an annual set aside of $1,000 each for routine maintenance.

“Beginning with the dollars we have designated for maintenance may not see any work in a given year, the Institution has calculated the average annual need over the 10-15 year time line. Each has their needs, large and small.”

So far, only a few buildings in Chautauqua’s physical plant have the dependable flow of resources for their annual care and upkeep that endowment can provide, thereby freeing up annual resources for programming needs.

If you would be interested in discussing how you might help care for one of Chautauqua’s historic buildings, please contact Linda Stockley at the office of the Chautauqua Foundation. Linda can be reached by calling 716-357-6220.

These dollars are not for cleaning or utilities,” explains Geof Follansbee. “These are the resources that must be applied to maintain historic structures. While a number of the 100 assets we have designated for maintenance may not see any work in a given year, the Institution has calculated the average annual need over the 10-15 year timeline. Each has their needs, large and small.”

As an example, a foot of snow on the Amphitheater roof. A similar load caused damage to the front porch of Logan Dormitory this winter. “These dollars are not for cleaning or utilities,” explains Geof Follansbee. “These are the resources that must be applied to maintain historic structures. While a number of the 100 assets we have designated for maintenance may not see any work in a given year, the Institution has calculated the average annual need over the 10-15 year timeline. Each has their needs, large and small.”

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As an example, a foot of snow on the Amphitheater roof. A similar load caused damage to the front porch of Logan Dormitory this winter.
In early February, Chautauqua President Tom Becker announced the formation of an Amphitheater Study Group, charged with exploring the challenges inherent in ensuring that Chautauqua’s architectural centerpiece continues to serve the community and our mission for this century and beyond.

“There is no project of higher value than this project,” Becker said. “This building is where our community has come together since 1893. The Study Group will help us examine the critical issues central to its rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction, and to set a framework for the design process.”

The work of the Study Group will be facilitated by Marty Serena, a Chicago architect who specializes in sustainable design. Other design professionals included in the Study Group are:

• Architect Mitchell Kurtz who has designed numerous theater facilities, including Playwrights Horizons and the New York Theatre Workshop in New York City, Arts Bank in Philadelphia, and Chautauqua’s Bratton Theater for which he won several awards;
• Tania Werbizky, who serves as Western Regional Director for the Preservation League of New York State;
• Bill Laubscher, an international architect, who now resides in Stedman and whose initial work as project manager was reported in the last issue of Pillars;
• Mark Permar of Permar Inc., a Charleston, SC, land use planner who has worked on various projects with Chautauqua Institution since 1990; and,
• Michael Conroe, an architect with Foit-Albert Associates, Buffalo, NY, who led the comprehensive building study of the Amphitheater in 2008.

Two members of the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra and six members from the Chautauqua community at large will also join the study group. Members of the Institution staff including Marty Merkley, John Shedd and Geof Follansbee will also participate in the process.

While the full Study Group will hold its initial meeting in early June, the design professionals met in early March to tour the Amphitheater, review prior planning studies, determine additional data required, and discuss possible processes for establishing recommendations. The full Study Group will work throughout the summer and submit their report by the end of October this year for consideration by staff and by the board at its November and February meetings.
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After graduating from the College of William and Mary, Manross taught biology at a small liberal arts college in Pennsylvania. Then during the very early days of personal computing, Apple Computer moved him to Cincinnati, Ohio. From there he went on to help build a number of technology start ups. Having become an avid sailor and remembering this region from his youth, Manross began renting a place at Chautauqua in the 1990s, then bought a home on the grounds in 2003.

Jane Rayburg grew up in Erie, Pennsylvania, attended Edinboro State College and Gannon University and currently works as the Corporate Compliance Officer for Saint Vincent Health System in Erie and Westfield Memorial Hospital in Westfield, NY. She occasionally came to Chautauqua in her youth for concerts, but didn’t start renting a place with friends until the 2003 season.

Deac and Jane were introduced in 2005 by common friends at the Erie Yacht Club, who thought the two might be perfect for each other. Between their common sailing interests and mutual appreciation of Chautauqua, it didn’t take long. Deac proposed to Jane in the Spring of 2006 at the Hall of Philosophy.

“I came across a table set up on the stairs there with tulips, photos of us, and a ring box on the table,” says Jane. “Then suddenly I turn around and there he was with his guitar singing his proposal to me.

“You’re not going to put that part in Pillars, are you?” Deac asks. “I don’t want people thinking I’m some kind of ‘new age sensitive guy.’”

Jane laughs. “We celebrated our wedding a year later in June at the Hall of Philosophy with the reception at the Athenaeum. It was an incredibly beautiful setting and we were so excited to share ‘our special place’ with all of our widely dispersed friends and family;

Now with a condo on the corner of Miller and South Terrace, the Manrosses come to Chautauqua for New Years, on occasional weekends, and for as much as they can manage every summer, usually two to four weeks. Though they hiked the Alps in Switzerland for their honeymoon, their “big bucket list” still contains the greater goal of spending an entire summer at Chautauqua. They especially love Old First Night when they can stand up with all the other couples that were married at Chautauqua.

Jane loves the Sunday worship services and quiet time beside the lake. “Time slows down here,” she says. “The pace and scale of Chautauqua is what we’d like to emulate in our harried lives back in Erie.”

Deac agrees. “This place is our touchstone and it engages my inner Renaissance man.” He grins. “You know how long distance runners get an endorphin high? Well, Chautauqua is like educational endorphins, a learning high. It is also a place of seeking balance. In this age of talk radio polemics, things are not just black or white at Chautauqua ... and that’s a really important perspective.”

— Deac Manross

A Chautauqua Love Story

DEAC AND JANE MANROSS

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Both Deac and Jane earned their CLSC certificates this past season. “I felt like we were stepping back in time,” says Jane. “It was amazing.”

“I thought we should have been wearing laurels on our heads,” Deac says,”and I kept looking over my shoulder to see if William Jennings Bryan would somehow magically appear. Somebody from the outside might think this is the corniest thing, but I enjoyed being part of the history of it—the vigil in the dark with candles, everyone waiting for us.”

The Manrosses are also in their first year as members of the Bestor Society, a group of donors whose annual gifts are critical to the yearly operation of Chautauqua. “There are an incredible number of worthy institutions in need of funding, but we both feel so blessed to be able to experience Chautauqua, and feel a strong obligation to make sure that Chautauqua can continue to be available to others in the future. We also wanted to put aside something for the long-term preservation of the grounds of Chautauqua, so we specified an amount for care of the Hall of Philosophy in our wills” says Jane.

“We also want part of our gift to go to support scholarships and music in honor of my mother, who was a music teacher and loved it here as well,” Deac adds. For all their mutual time at Chautauqua now, the couple says they are still amazed at how, with more and more people coming in for shorter stays, the new community seems to gel so easily each week. They also consider themselves “Chautauqua evangelists,” sharing mailings with friends about the Institution and offering their condo to family and friends when they are not on the grounds. Among the guests this past summer were the groomsmen from their wedding, one of whom was Deac’s best friend from school who played 5-string banjo to Deac’s guitar back in the 1960s, singing Kingston Trio songs. Once more they played Kingston Trio songs on the porch last summer, fifty-one years after that first concert in the Amp.

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Court said she keenly felt the absence of an independent bookstore among the many arts amenities in Sarasota/Bradenton, so she started one.

Georgia Court is a doer. She is the author of a young adult novel, the former publisher of a healthcare newspaper, and a former public relations professional. She moved to Sarasota from Cincinnati three years ago.

Court’s drive also characterizes her engagement with Chautauqua, where she first came to take a writing workshop in 1996. She liked it so much she came back the next two years and finally bought a house in 2003. Before long, she was elected president of the Chautauqua Literary Arts Friends. “I enjoy keeping company with other writers and the authors who come to teach workshops at Chautauqua,” says Court. “Some of them have become my best friends.”

Court has not only donated her time and talents to Chautauqua’s Writers’ Center, but she has made several generous gifts to support its programming. “I think as a practical matter, people have to invest in things they love and want to keep vibrant,” she says. “We will always need funds to keep the personnel employed to help run the Writers’ Center, but I also want to be sure we have what we need to bring in big name authors. It’s as simple as that.”

The Court Family Endowment for the Literary Arts at Chautauqua supports programming and an annual internship within the Writers’ Center. Court has also created a second endowment fund that is open to gifts from other donors who want to support the literary arts at Chautauqua but could not meet the threshold gift amount required to start their own endowment fund. Court has also made a significant gift to underwrite the visits of distinguished writers over the next five years.

Both Chautauquans and Sarasota residents are the beneficiaries of Georgia Court’s enthusiasm, vision, and energy. She’s brought her generous spirit to Bookstore 1, her new enterprise, and she’s also bringing her author friends from Chautauqua for readings and book signings to Florida. Poet William Heyen, a popular Chautauqua workshop leader whose book Poetics of Hiroshima was a CLSC selection in 2010, gave the inaugural reading at Court’s store on opening day. Later in the month, another Chautauqua poet and instructor, Robert Cording, spoke at Bookstore 1. Cording will be teaching an advanced poetry workshop in weeks eight and nine at the Institution this summer.

Another Chautauqua writer, Mary Anne Morefield, published her first poem in high school, but the demands of her professional life as a pastor and a college chaplain kept her from creative writing for many years. She credits the Chautauqua Writers’ Center for getting her writing life back on track when she began to take poetry workshops on the grounds. Morefield’s engagement with the Writers’ Center has been steady over the years, serving first on the summer advisory board when Mary Jean Irion was in charge. She served as vice president of the Writers’ Center board when Rodney Lay shepherded the creation of both The Chautauqua Literary Journal and the annual Writers’ Festival that precedes the opening of the summer season. She later followed Georgia Court as president of the Chautauqua Literary Arts Friends and currently serves as past president of the Friends.

Morefield worked closely with Court on the renovation of both the second floor of Alumni Hall—now home to the Writers’ Center—and the third floor that now houses weekly workshop leaders, their families, staff, and other literary guests of the Institution. “Georgia and I enjoyed the project,” Morefield says. “We helped plan space, selected furniture, rugs, and colors, and then, before the season, with the help of friends and husbands, put together furniture, arranged the rooms and made the bed. It was all very hands on. Chautauqua writers needed a special place, and we were happy to contribute in any way we could toward making the Literary Arts Center a reality. Of course, we constantly have new dreams for the literary arts as part of the Institution’s programming.”

Morefield’s current interest is in expanding the poetry workshops the Writers’ Center offers and has recently made a significant gift to endowment in support of poetry at Chautauqua. “These are examples of donors who have stretched themselves in service to the program they love and one where they believe Chautauqua can add incredible value,” says Foundation CEO Geoff Follansbee. “Such investments of time, talent, and treasure by Chautauquans help carry us to new levels of excellence in this work and we are so appreciative of Georgia and Mary Anne.”
The Role Of Unrestricted Giving

“We really couldn’t do the lecture platform in any given week without a variety of donors,” says Chautauqua education director Sherra Babcock. “Almost every lecture is supported in some way by philanthropy.” Chautauqua is able to bring internationally recognized speakers, in part because of its reputation as an important national forum, but, says Babcock, “we are making a further investment in our ability to invite a range of voices to address a weekly theme.”

Extending this hospitality must also be supported by philanthropy. Unrestricted gifts to the Chautauqua lecture platform are critical to the Institution’s ability to invite a range of voices to address a weekly theme, says Babcock. “Almost every couple was very clear: the reason we gave was we wanted to continue to come to Chautauqua. And the place because it reminds them of the towns where they grew up. And they love meeting new people each season and hearing their stories. They never know what the season will bring, but they always feel connected.”

“I’m not in the program office, so I don’t know how to do what they are doing. I only know that I’ve never been disappointed in the program at Chautauqua, so I see our unrestricted gift as a means by which those who do know what they are doing in running the Institution have the means to do it.”

Gifts in support of endowment can be made by check, through a transfer of securities, or through any number of gift planning vehicles. Please call the development office for more information, at 716-357-6244.